

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL: A REVIEW OF CHANCE'S THE
TEACHER'S CRAFT: THE TEN ESSENTIAL SKILLS OF
EFFECTIVE TEACHING

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Paul Chance's most recent book is *The Teacher's Craft: The Ten Essential Skills of Effective Teaching* (2008b). Written primarily for teachers of Grades K through 12, the book is organized into 10 lessons that are designed to focus on separable aspects of an effective teaching repertoire. Overall, Chance's book is well written and should appeal to teachers of all levels. Although it could be strengthened by the inclusion of more research and exclusion of weak research or suggestions not currently supported by research, it is certainly a welcome addition to the how-to-teach books that currently flood the market.

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Paul Chance has a strong track record of writing about behavior analysis for broad audiences, especially students. *Learning and Behavior* (2008a), his textbook on learning that is now in its sixth edition, is widely used in university courses, as is his book *First Course in Applied Behavior Analysis* (1998). The latter book was favorably reviewed in this journal (Kellum & Carr, 1998). Chance's most recent work is *The Teacher's Craft: The Ten Essential Skills of Effective Teaching* (2008b). As clearly stated at the outset of the book, *The Teacher's Craft* "is an effort to offer what the best available evidence says about effective teaching" (p. ix).

Written primarily for teachers of Grades K through 12, the book is organized into 10 lessons designed to focus on separable aspects of an effective teaching repertoire, with each chapter clearly leading to the next. As such, the book really is best read from beginning to end. We began by reading two or three chapters at a time and quickly found that we were better served by carving out a couple of hours to go

through the entire book and then later reviewing those chapters that most interested us. We also encourage readers to begin with the prologue because, as Chance points out, surprisingly large numbers of books written about teaching fail to define teaching at the outset. A strength of this book is that Chance clearly operationalizes what he means by "teaching" in the prologue as "doing things that improve the rate, durability, and transfer of learning" (p. 3), and then goes on to operationalize and provide examples for the terms *rate*, *durability*, and *transfer of learning*. Most behavioral scientists would likely expect this, but it might initially surprise the intended audience. It definitely sets a nice tone for the rest of the book. Although the book is not aimed at college-level instructors, a great deal of the material lends itself to ready adoption with only minor modifications in the college classroom. Although we "knew" most of what was presented in the book, we found it invaluable to contact the material as presented by Chance. It was invaluable both because it reminded us of a number of strategies that we had been neglecting and because it is useful to read another person's description and explanation of familiar principles and strategies.

Chance peppers the book with well-worn tricks of the behavior-analytic trade. Many of

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these will be familiar to the readers of this journal, but they are likely to be quite novel to the intended audience. For example, in Chapter 1, Chance recommends that teachers make clear what exactly is expected of students and that, when possible, classroom rules should be stated in terms of what *to* do, rather than what *not* to do. His explanation is simple: Clearly stating what not to do does nothing to clarify what one should do instead. Chance also emphasizes the importance of positive comments over negative ones and suggests that teachers count their comments during the class period to get an idea of how infrequently they make use of positive comments, particularly in proportion to negative comments. This is a simple, basic, low-tech change teachers can make that will likely improve student behavior fairly quickly.

Chance also challenges a number of commonly held beliefs about educational practices. For example, he belies the current notion that “to drill is to kill” and instead suggests that deliberate, repetitive practice improves performance, retention, and transfer and that feedback from teachers that is short, specific, and public allows students to improve on their current level of performance (Chapter 6). He provides examples for how to accomplish various goals of learning through practice, and cites several examples of research that suggests that differences between “experts” and “novices” are mainly a matter of a decade or more of this type of practice, rather than some inherent genetic ability. Chance addresses another widely held belief that motivation is “intrinsic” and students either “have it or don’t” (Chapter 8), citing research that motivation is an outcome or consequence of other variables, many of which are under the control of the teacher (i.e., it is an outcome of poor teaching or a poor teaching environment rather than an intrinsic condition of particular students). He directly addresses Alfie Kohn’s (1993) (no relation!) inaccurate portrayal of reinforcement as bribery that

reduces students’ intrinsic motivation and cites empirically based suggestions for implementing certain types of rewards. He also highlights Skinner’s (1968) suggestions that natural reinforcers be encouraged (this often is overlooked by Skinner’s critics). He reiterates this point when discussing assessments and the mechanics of learning and provides several suggestions for how teachers might use assessment as a formative tool (Chapter 7). He cites research that supports the use of frequent, brief assessments that can also serve the function of providing additional practice for students. To that end, he credits Skinner for identifying that students are more likely to remember a wrong answer on a multiple-choice test unless the teacher immediately reviews the correct answers after the test is completed. In addition to assessing *what* students learn, Chance emphasizes the importance of *how* students learn (Chapter 9). He cites research showing that the largest differences between poor students and good students often have less to do with genetics or intrinsic abilities and more to do with practice and the acquisition of specific skills. He provides some suggestions for how to teach students to learn, and although some strategies are backed by solid empirical support (e.g., acronyms), and others are simply intuitively appealing (e.g., knowledge mapping), we do have some concern about the use of poor research to support the value of rewards in the BookIt! Program (p. 110). Moreover, based on what we do know about educational research, it struck us that a fair amount of what is recommended has not been put to direct empirical test in the classroom, even if it might have been tested in other settings with other populations (e.g., feedback with sailors rather than students in Chapter 5). In this way the book might serve as a sort of springboard for students and teachers who are interested in research ideas.

Although several chapters in Chance’s book, perhaps more so than most books about effective teaching, do contain clear, strong

references to relevant research, the tendency to include information without references to relevant research is still present. We are teachers, although we are not educational psychologists or researchers. Thus, we are somewhat familiar with educational research, but not intimately so. In many places, we found ourselves asking whether any clear research exists for some of the claims being made, because many of Chance's claims aren't supported by reference citations. Chapters 3, 4, and 10 are perhaps the best examples of this. Most of the suggestions in these chapters have intuitive appeal but are not supported with reference citations. For example, Chance suggests that teachers "show students the way" by using modeling, graphs, pictures, drawings, the Socratic method, coaxing, and verbal guidance (Chapter 3). He appears to be describing the basic behavioral principles of shaping, although he never states this explicitly. In Chapter 4, Chance addresses three seemingly unrelated concepts: "active learning," the use of what Chance calls a "phantom parent" to guide teachers' behaviors, and general classroom management for students' answering questions (e.g., raising hands, calling out, getting the most out of a question in terms of student participation). In the last chapter he addresses students' misbehavior and provides a hodgepodge of suggestions, some behavioral (e.g., praise opposite behavior in another child, implement time-out correctly) and some more admonishments of what not to do (e.g., physical punishment) rather than what to do. In the last chapter, more than the others, Chance appears to cite the very types of books he suggests he does not want to emulate, that is, those written by former teachers based entirely on their personal experiences with teaching. Although K through 12 teachers may find some value in this chapter, it is less rigorous and more of a catchall than the other chapters. Altogether, these three chapters seem to be included because they discuss topics important to

teachers, but they have more of an "everything but the kitchen sink" feel about them.

Chance also provides an epilogue, a list of additional readings, and appendices. The epilogue provides a nice closure to the book, attempting to allay some of the discouragement readers may have about the state of affairs in today's educational system. We would have liked to see, if it exists, a list of resources for teachers who seek additional training, supervision, or feedback on their teaching skills. Moreover, we would have liked more accessible reference information. We do appreciate the way that the layout minimizes distraction from the text, and we certainly understand that academicians (e.g., researchers) are not the intended audience. However, we think it would have been a powerful supplement to have each chapter conclude with an easily referenced table listing and brief description of the research relevant to that chapter. Chance also makes several observant comments throughout the book, but these are also relegated to the back section, and might have been more user friendly if put into footnote format.

The appendices are the one section in which Chance provides specific, hands-on instructions for implementing some of the teaching strategies he discusses throughout the book. Although we found the item analysis cumbersome, we did appreciate his discussion of the rationale and the importance of not simply throwing out items that a majority of students answer incorrectly. His discussion of grades, and the benefits of grading against an identified standard rather than on a curve, is very thoughtful and well articulated. He spends a bit of time discussing the merits of having students continually track their progress and suggests some ways to accomplish this. He makes mention of the benefits of using a system such as Fred Keller's personalized system of instruction (Keller & Sherman, 1982), but laments, realistically, our society's ability to move to such a system. Finally, Chance explains, describes, and pro-

vides examples of a variety of token economies for students at different levels. He discusses the strengths and weaknesses of token economies, and how they commonly fail. This is one of the more impressive sections of the book, particularly given the amount of information presented in such a succinct and clear manner.

Overall, Chance's book is well written and should appeal to teachers of all levels. Although it could be strengthened by the inclusion of more research and exclusion of weak research or suggestions not currently supported by research, it is certainly a welcomed addition to the how-to-teach books that currently flood the market. We would recommend this book for new or seasoned teachers and suggest that they read the book from cover to cover and then return to it for particular issues they wish to address.

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